

Appendix C
LITTLE DONEY LAKE PROPERTIES
FEE TITLE PURCHASE
DRAFT SOCIO-ECONOMIC ASSESSMENT

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE AND PARKS

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I. INTRODUCTION

House Bill 526, passed by the 1987 Legislature (MCA 87-1-241 and MCA 87-1-242), authorizes Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MFWP) to acquire an interest in land for the purpose of protecting and improving wildlife habitat. These acquisitions can be through fee title, conservation easements, or leasing. In 1989, the Montana legislature passed House Bill 720 requiring that a socioeconomic assessment be completed when wildlife habitat is acquired using Habitat Montana monies. These assessments evaluate the significant social and economic impacts of the purchase on local governments, employment, schools, and impacts on local businesses.

This socioeconomic evaluation addresses the fee title purchase of land presently owned by The Nature Conservancy (TNC). The report addresses the physical and institutional setting as well as the social and economic impacts associated with the proposed conservation easement.

II. PHYSICAL AND INSTITUTIONAL SETTING

A. Property Description

The subject property is located about 50 miles from Missoula, Mt., in Powell County, adjoining the administrative boundary of the Blackfoot-Clearwater Wildlife Management Area (BCWMA). This fee title purchase encompasses approximately 2,623 acres. A detailed description of this property is included in the draft environmental assessment (EA).

B. Habitat and Wildlife Populations

The Little Doney Lake properties are part of the fall-winter-spring range for about 500 elk and about 200 white-tailed deer and 200 mule deer. In addition to ruffed and blue grouse, black bear, mountain lion, coyote, moose and wolf, these parcels are also important occupied habitat for grizzly bear and waterfowl (including trumpeter swans), owing in part to the wetlands and associated broad riparian areas near the North Fork of the Blackfoot River. One of very few common loon nest sites in the Blackfoot watershed exists on Little Doney Lake.

C. Current Use

TNC currently owns these properties. Historically, extensive commercial timber harvest has occurred, the most recent in the early 2000s. Livestock grazing has been precluded in recent years. These properties are important for public access and hunting as part of the Ovando Mountain Block Management Area.

D. Management Alternatives

- 1) Fee title purchase of the subject property by MFWP
- 2) No purchase

Alternative 1, fee title purchase of the property will protect the integrity of this property as wildlife habitat, allow MFWP to manage the subject lands as part of the BCWMA, and maintain the current level of public access to the property.

Alternative 2, the no purchase option, leaves portions of these properties at risk in terms of preserving their wildlife habitat values and providing public access. Currently, TNC holds fee title to these properties until a suitable buyer is found. If FWP does not purchase these properties, other suitable buyers are not identified who would manage to maintain and enhance wildlife habitat as well as provide traditional public access. Ultimately, TNC must dispose of fee-title to these properties, and in a worst-case scenario may have to identify one or more home sites on the properties to accomplish one or more sales.

III. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACTS

Section II identified the management alternatives this report addresses. Fee title purchase will provide long term protection of important wildlife habitat, help to preserve the open space characteristics and integrity of the BCWMA, and provide for public access. Section III quantifies the social and economic consequences of the two management alternatives following two basic accounting stances: financial and local area impacts.

Financial impacts address the cost of the fee title purchase to MFWP and discuss the impacts on tax revenues to local government agencies including school districts.

Expenditure data associated with the use of the property provides information for analyzing the impacts these expenditures have on local businesses (i.e. income and employment).

A. Financial Impacts

The financial impacts on MFWP are related to the fee title purchase price and the maintenance/management costs. The TNC properties will cost MFWP up to \$1,522,355 in Habitat Montana funds. The full funding package, including other FWP managed funding sources, are described in detail in the attached Draft EA. Maintenance/management costs related to the purchase are associated with weed control, fencing, etc.

The financial impacts to local governments are the potential changes in tax revenues resulting from the fee title purchase. MCA 87-1-603 states that “ the treasurer of each county in which the department owns any land shall describe the land, state the number of acres in each parcel, and request the drawing of a warrant to the county in a sum equal to the amount of taxes which would be payable on county assessment of the property were it taxable to a private citizen.”

There will be no significant changes in property tax revenues to local governments including schools due to the purchase of this land by MFWP.

B. Economic Impacts

The purchase of this land will have a minimal or no negative impact, compared with current management under TNC ownership. Consistent with the management plan for this land, forest management would continue the current shift from an historic emphasis on commercial timber production to an emphasis on providing forested forage and cover for a diversity of wildlife species.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

As noted at the beginning of this document, the TNC property is located in Powell County near the community of Ovando.

This fee title purchase will provide protection for critical habitat for elk, mule deer, and white-tailed deer that use the BCWMA, as well as Tier One Species identified in the Montana Comprehensive Fish and Wildlife Conservation Strategy. The purchase will remove the concern about subdivision thereby preserving the integrity of wildlife habitat for diverse species of wildlife.

The fee title purchase by MFWP of the subject property will not have a significant effect on tax revenues collected by Powell County on these acres from their current levels.

The impact to local businesses will be minimal. FWP will continue current management and the shift in timber management on the property from historic commercial timber production to timber management focused on providing forage and cover for wildlife. The subject property was commercially logged regularly through the early 2000s. However, the property has not been logged since owned by TNC. MFWP does not plan on introducing livestock on these acres in the near future.